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ABSTRACT

The national attention focused on child sexual abuse has resulted in calls for prevention programs and ways to protect children. A child sexual abuse prevention program was developed and implemented by social workers in all the public elementary schools of a high-risk county in cooperation with the Council on Child Abuse, the Department of Family and Children's Services, school officials, parent-teacher organizations, and interested county citizens. The program was evaluated for effectiveness using pretest and posttest scores. Differences between scores of girls and boys and between nonminority and minority children were examined as well as overall differences. Statistically significant differences between white children and black children were found on the posttest scores, but no difference was found between pretest and posttest scores for males and females. The results demonstrated that the education program significantly raised the children's readiness to recognize and handle potentially harmful situations. (TE)

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PREVENTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:
A SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Re: Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT

The national attention focused on child sexual abuse has resulted in calls for prevention programs and ways to protect children. The authors present a child sexual abuse prevention education program which was developed and implemented by social workers in all the public elementary schools of a high risk county in cooperation with the Council on Child Abuse, the Department of Family and Children's Services, school officials, parent-teacher organizations and interested county citizens. Details of the implementation of the program are described. The program was evaluated for effectiveness using pretest and posttest scores. Differences between scores of girls and boys and between non-minority and minority children were examined as well as overall differences. Statistically significant diffeences were found in several comparisons. The results demonstrated that the education program significantly raised the children's readiness to recognize and handle potentially harmful situations.

Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse:
A School-Based Program Evaluation

Child abuse is currently one of the most pervasive social problems in this country. A review of child sexual abuse prevalence studies by Finkelhor (1986) indicates that prevalnce rates range from 6% to 62% for females and from three percent to 31% for males. The wide variance in rates are due to some extent to diffeences in definitions of sexual abuse, ages sampled, and types of sexual experiences included.

Special attention has been directed toward child sexual abuse with the uncovering of sexual abuse of children in daycare facilities, residential treatment centers, and other generally trusted child-serving agencies. Additionally, cases of abuse by family members and friends have created feelings of shock and disbelief across the country with a resulting call for prevention and education programs that will develop ways to protect children.

There are two basic directions that prevention of child abuse may take: (1) A focus on the perpetrator; or (2) a focus on the victim. The current literature demonstrates that social and demographic characteristics do not separate the perpetrator from the general population (Conte, 1984; Frue, 1982; Groth, Hobson, & Gary, 1982). As a result, identification of perpetrators on whom to focus prevention programs is difficult.

In addition, no truly effective form of treatment for the perpetrator has been found that will prevent recidivism (Finkelhor, 1982; Forseth & Brown, 1981; Froth et al., 1982). Attempts to prevent victimization of children through pornography is also difficult. Child pornography is a lucrative enterprise for its producers and is therefore well protected by them (See & Baker, 1978; National Legal Resource Center for Child Advocacy and Protection, 1981; Pierce, 1984). Those combating this industry do not find their work easy because production takes place in homes or motels. From the findings of these studies it appears that prevention of child sexual abuse which focuses on the perpetrator does not offer an easily obtained or greatly effective solution.

The remaining focus that prevention may take seems to offer more potential. Teaching children to protect themselves from sexual abuse equips them with skills they carry with them whereever they go. Since the majority of child sexual abuse appears to occur in a supposedly safe place and at the hands of a relative or someone known to the victim (Cantwell, 1981; DeJong, Hervada & Emmett, 1983; Finkelhor, 1979; Russell, 1983; Shamroy, 1980), the child is left in a position of vulnerability. Empowering a child through education, natural networks, assertiveness training, and problem-solving skills offers the child another response to abuse overtures besides submitting to the abuse. These and other alternative are what the prevention

programs now available attempt to teach children (Bowen, 1984; Chaze, 1984, Spungen, Jensen, Finkelstein, Satinsky, 1989).

This paper presents an educational of prevention program which was developed and implemented by school social workers for the public schools in a collaborative effort toward prevention with the Council on Child Abuse and parents organizations. The specifics of the program and its implementation are given. As most child sexual abuse prevention and education programs in use have been developed within recent years (Bowen, 1984; Chaze, 1984), there has been little opportunity to test the effectiveness of the programs in preventing child sexual abuse. Since this essential step is missing, professionals are unable to determine if directions and programs implemented are working or if other alternatives should be sought. This paper also addresses this existing gap by evaluating the effectiveness of a particular sexual abuse education program in school settings throughout a county in the southern part of the United States.

Methology

The purpose of the program reported here was to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of the Red Flag Green Flag program in the public elementary schools in one county. The county elementary schools became aware of the high rate of child abuse through the community awareness efforts of the local Council on Child Abuse and the Department of Family and Children's Services. The Council on Child Abuse met with school officials, elementary

school Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTO), and interested county citizens to present information on the Red Flag Green Flag program as one possible response to the problem. All agreed to introduce the Red Flag Green Flag program into the school system during the months of January through May, 1986. The venture was to remain under the control of the school system while the Council on Child Abuse was to supply training, supplies, and one leader to assist in the actual program.

Since there had been no earlier large-scale attempts at this type of training and in order to determine whether to continue the training past the specified time, the program was to be evaluated for its effectiveness.

The Red Flag Green Flag was developed in the Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota area by the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center and the Moorhead Police Department. For the purposes of this research a "Personal Safety Test," which was used as a pretest and posttest measure was constructed by the senior author with consultation by second grade teachers (See Addendum).

The evaluation of effectiveness was accomplished through measuring the children's acquisition of knowledge and skills by six multiple choice questions which had one right answer. The short-term objectives of the program were: (a) teaching the children how to recognize a potentially abusive situation, and (b) teaching the children skills to handle a potentially dangerous situation.

Definition of Terms. The program and its evaluation was based on Bloom's (1981) definition of primary prevention. According to Blooms, prevention involves obviating a potentially harmful combination of events while promoting beneficial combinations in an identifiable, at-risk population that is currently funcioning adequately. Within this framework, the Red Flag Green Flag program seeks to help children obviate circumstances leading to sexual abuse while teaching them problem-solving skills and coping strategies. For the purpose of this program, sexual abuse was defined as being touched on one's body which is normally covered by a bathing suit.

Hypothesis. The major hypothesis of the study was that after the children participated in the program they would demonstrate significantly more knowledge and skills in the areas measured than they did prior to taking the course. The differences would be measured through pretests and posttests.

Three basic questions were asked of the research. (1) Was there a significant differences in pretest and posttest scores? (2) Were pretest and posttest scores of non-minority children significantly different than those of minority children? (3) Were pretest and posttest scores of the girls significantly different from those of the boys?

Clients. The clients in this study were second grade students in the public school system in a rural county in Georgia. Since the Red Flag Green Flag program was taught as a

part of the second grade curriculum, every student present in the second grades in all the schools the days the program was taught received the training. The second grade was chosen for its age appropriateness for the training itself and the potential of sexual abuse in this population.

The total number of second graders in the county public schools was 590. This involved six elementary schools and twenty-four classes (The findings from six classes which were used to test, revise, and retest the instrument were not used). Seventeen children were eliminated from the study because demographic data on them was incomplete. The only three Mexican-American children were also excluded due to the small size of this minority group. A final sample size of 395 children was obtained. This involved five schools and eighteen classes. The children were between the ages of seven and nine with the exceptions of two six-year-olds, four ten-years-olds, and one eleven-year-old. As shown in Table 1, there were 52% males, 48% females, 62% white, and 38% black.

Insert Table 1 about here

Preparation for teaching the Red Flag Green Flag program consisted of several steps. Leadership materials and a video tape of the program being taught by experienced leaders were studied and discussed. The lead author worked closely with

experienced Red Flag Green Flag leaders and observed two classes undergoing the training. The author then met with the school social workers to provide further information and training. Prior to implementing the actual program, a three hour in-service was held for all second grade teachers. The purpose was to familiarize the teachers with the Red Flag Green Flag program, give them information regarding child sexual abuse, and prepare the teachers to provide follow-up with children as needed after the conclusion of the program. The in-service was led by the lead author, one school social worker, the child sexual abuse worker from the local Department of Family and Children's Services, and the Red Flag Green Flag coordinator from the adjacent county.

A final step in preparation involved educating the parents about the program. Presentations on the program were given by leaders for Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTO) of three elementary schools. The principals of the remaining three schools sent an information letter about the program to parents of second graders. As the program was considered to be educational and part of the curriculum, no parental consents were required. Once the program began, the local newspaper also ran an article explaining the program. The first six second grade classes taught were used to revise the instrument and enable the leaders to gain experience actually teaching the program. The Red Flag Green Flag program was taught one hour per day for three

consecutive days in each individual second grade classroom. Three leaders were involved in teaching the program, including two school social workers and the lead author. One school social worker had 20 years of experience in social work, the other 8 years. Both had prior experience as teachers. The lead author had six years of experience in social work with children.

Program Description

The Red Flag Green Flag program centers around a coloring book which progressively teaches the child to discriminate between green flag (good) touches and red flag (bad or threatening) touches and red or green flag people. Each child learns who makes up his/her support system and how and when to utilize that support system. They are also instructed to color on a nude, doll-like picture where they have personally received green or red flag touches. These pictures were discussed individually between the child and one of the leaders, and it is at this point that current or past cases of abuse are frequently uncovered. Along with the coloring book, three videotapes are utilized to show children talking about unwanted touching and how children can handle potentially dangerous situations. Throughout the course, discussion facilitated by the leaders is used to teach and answer questions (Red Flag Green Flag People Program Guide, 1985).

Extensive preparation was done before the program was conducted. The preparation consisted of providing in-service

training for the school social workers and second grade teachers, educating parents about the program, and providing information to the public through newspaper articles. The program was taught one hour per day for three consecutive days in each individual second grade classroom. There were generally two leaders for each class, the lead author, and one of the school social workers.

Results

Many of the children participating in the Red Flag Green Flag training demonstrated an awareness of self protection skills on their pretests. The range of possible scores was zero to six and the mean score on the pretest was 3.6. The mean increased to 4.7 on the posttest with a range of scores from one to six. Table 2 gives the data on the pretest and protest scores by client sub-groups.

Insert Table 2 about here

The rankings of the pretest and posttest means for each subgroup suggest there were some differences between these children on the tests. On the pretest, the mean score for white females was the highest, followed by white males, black males, and black females in that order. The posttest mean score rankings were the same except that the black female's mean score moved ahead of the black males' mean score. The black males had

the lowest posttest mean score but all groups increased their scores.

The difference in pretest and posttest scores for all clients was examined using a student t-test. The results indicated a statistically significant increase in knowledge about sexually abusive behavior after the conclusion of the program [t 9394) = 19.6, $p < .001$]. When the scores for white students were separately examined, similar positive improvements were obtained [t (242) = 16.3, $p < .001$].... Scores for black students also showed significant improvements [t (151) = 11.2, $p < .001$]. Scores by gender were obtained which also showed improvement in knowledge for males [t (204) = 13.7, $p < .001$] and for females [t (1989) = 14.1, $p < .001$].

After determining that there was an overall significant improvement in scores, pretest and posttest scores were compared between races and between genders using two-tailed t-tests. The results are summarized in Table 3. No pretest difference was found between white children and black children. However, on the posttest the white children scored significantly higher ($t(393) = 3.8$, $p < .001$) than did black children. No difference was found between pretest scores and posttest scores for males and females.

Insert Table 3 about here

The data were examined for an interaction effect between

race and gender. This allows for differences that exist between and within racial and gender groups on pretest and posttest scores. As shown in Table 3, several interactions were found to be significant. The white females scored significantly higher on pretest scores than did black males or females. On the pretest, white males scored significantly higher than did black females, but on the posttest the white males scored significantly higher than did black males.

The white females appear to have entered the training with more awareness than did the other children and still be more aware after the training. The black females apparently entered the training with the least awareness and gained more from the training than did black males. White males, while not as informed about self-protection as white females prior to the training, showed more awareness than the black children before and after training.

Discussion and Applications for Practice

The Red Flag Green Flag program, as taught in all the second grades of one county to over 395 children, (195 more received the training but their results were not included) has significantly raised the participating children's readiness to recognize and handle potentially harmful situations. In light of the severe sexual abuse rate in the county studied, as compared with other counties in the state, these children would seem to have an edge over children not receiving the training. This program has now

been conducted in all the schools in this and several surrounding counties for three years. Several refinements have been made in the program. One refinement is that two case workers from the Department of Family and Children's Services attend the first two sessions in all schools. In the second session when the children use the coloring books, the social worker leader and caseworker talk individually to each child. This personal contact serves to answer the child's questions, to enable the adult to identify possible abuse situations, and open the door for further contact if help is needed. Volunteers and teachers have also been trained to teach the programs under the direction of the social workers with good results. The pretest-posttest has been revised to include more minority faces (See Addendum for revised test). With these revisions the program has been conducted successfully in other counties for several years and seems to be generalizable to other school systems.

Teaching children sexual abuse prevention skills is an important tool in combating the epidemic of sexual abuse. A growing number of education and prevention programs addressing the issue offer a variety of choices and approaches. However, blindly selecting a program can be detrimental to the target population. The positive results found in this systematic implementation and evaluation of the Red Flag Green Program indicate that this particular program may be successfully used by school systems to train young children to protect themselves from

sexual abuse. Future research is needed to ascertain whether the program is less effective with black children, is not culturally geared toward this minority, or if other factors are at work. Additional research on the program objectives would provide leaders with information on areas of the program in which children are especially uneducated and need more training.

A limitation of this study was not having a standard, reliable measure to use. Another limitation was the absence of a control group for comparison. Without the control, changes in pretest and posttest scores due to maturation, history, and interaction between the pretest and posttest cannot be ruled out.

Generalizability of this study is influenced by several factors. The target population was drawn from one specific frame of reference, a rural county. The leaders' expertise and training style could influence how adequately each objective was covered. The classroom teachers' interest and level of support for the program could affect the students' participation and receptivity. These are all factors which could vary between settings and influence outcomes.

Finally, it is unclear if the children will retain this information over time or use it when actually threatened with sexual abuse. Longitudinal research is needed to better measure the preventive nature of the program. A question to be answered is whether the amount of improvement after training is indeed sufficient. While change after training may be statistically

significant, it may not be thought adequate for the children to truly be prepared. Criteria need to be established which would determine the level of behavioral attainment after training that is consider to be adequate for effective prevention of child sexual abuse.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Georgia County Second Grade Sample

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Race		
White	243	62
Black	152	38
Gender		
Male	205	52
Female	190	48
Subgroupings		
White Male	129	33
Black Male	76	19
White Female	114	29
Black Female	76	19

Table 2

Data for Pretest and Posttest Scores by Sub-Groups

	Pretest* N = 395		Posttest N = 395	
Variable	M	SD	M	SD
Total Sample	3.565	1.09	4.714	1.04
Race				
White (N = 243)	3.716	1.097	4.868	0.999
Black (N = 152)	3.322	1.04	4.467	1.05
Gender				
Male (N = 205)	3.532	1.02	4.629	1.13
Female (N = 190)	3.6	1.17	4.805	0.92
Subgroups				
White Male (N = 129)	3.628	1.04	4.806	1.08
Black Male (N = 76)	3.368	0.96	4.329	1.16
White Female (N = 114)	3.816	1.16	4.939	0.895
Black Female (N = 76)	3.276	1.11	4.605	0.92

*Since the measure consisted of six questions, the range of possible correct scores was 0-6.

Table 3

Differences in Pretest Scores and Posttest Scores by Race and Gender

	Pretest			Posttest		
Variable	t[a]	df	p	t[a]	df	p
Race (White vs Black)	0.223	393	ns	3.798	393	.001
Gender (Male vs Female)	0.618	393	ns	1.687	393	ns
Subgroups[b]						
WM - BM	1.774	203	ns	2.969	203	.01
WF - BF	3.196	188	.01	2.481	188	.05
WM - WF	-1.334	241	ns	-1.031	241	ns
BM - BF	0.545	150	ns	-1.624	150	ns
WM - BF	2.278	203	.05	1.352	203	ns
BM - WF	-2.788	188	.01	-4.081	188	.001

[a]Two-tailed t-test of independent samples.

[b]Subgroup abbreviations are as follows: W-White, B-Black, M-Male, F-Female.

NAME _____

HOW OLD ARE YOU?_____

CIRCLE ONE: BOY GIRL R: W B M/A O _____

PERSONAL SAFETY TEST

Directions: Color in the cirlcle by the right answer on each question.

1. What should you do with a problem?

   O Forget about it
   O Tell someone about it
   O Don't tell anyone

2. We are touched by many people. Some touches are good, some touches are bad. How can you tell if a touch is good or bad?

   O If you like the person who touched you or not.
   O The person who touched you tells you it is OK or not.
   O How the touch makes you feel.

3. Which person is the dangerous or scary person?

   O

   O

   O

   O

   O None of them

   O I can't tell

4. Who can help you with a problem?

   O Teacher
   O Parent
   O Friend
   O Policeman
   O All of them
   O No one

5. If someone tries to hurt you, what should you do?

- o Say no, get away, and tell somebody
- o Try to get even with them
- o Don't tell anyone and stay away from that person.

6. One day Tommy went to the park by himself to play. His mother had told him never to go alone but he did anyway. While he was there, a man hurt Tommy. Who was to blame for Tommy getting hurt?

- o Tommy's Mom
- o The man
- o Tommy
- o No one

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